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China has had the same written language, "wen-yan," since the third century B.C. "Wen-yan is the classical, literary language. In this paper the author discusses the five problems which must be considered with regard to the teaching of classical Chinese to American college students. These are: (1) why this literary language should be taught, (2) how it differs from "pai-hwa (modern Chinese) and what should be taught first, (3) which materials are suitable for teaching classical Chinese to beginning and advanced students, (4) what background is necessary for learning the classical language, and (5) who is qualified to teach it. (DO)

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Fundamental Approaches to the Teaching of Literary Chinese

A paper delivered at the 21st University of Kentucky Foreign Language Conference, Lexington, Kentucky, April 25-27, 1968,

by

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There are five basic problems with which we have to concern ourselves in regard to the teaching of literary or classical Chinese to American college and university students. These are: Why teach? How to teach? What to teach? When to teach? and Who can teach?

First, why do we have to teach classical Chinese in American colleges and universities? We know there are two kinds of written Chinese: pai-hwa or modern Chinese and wen-yan or classical Chinese. Without minimizing the contribution and usefulness of pai-hwa to Chinese intellectual discipline and life, we can never forget for one moment the extensive importance of wen-yan in the formation of Chinese as a unified, viable society with a great culture. Chinese civilization, as we understand it, is one of the few that have remained continous living civilizations. Reasons are many. But the most important one is the fact that China has had the same written language since the third century B.C. This written language is wen-yan or classical Chinese. Without an adequate knowledge of this written language we can hardly understand and appreciate the true character and basic attitudes

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of the Chinese people. For instance, Chinese poetry in its traditional style which portrays these characteristics and attitudes is written in classical, not modern, Chinese.

Here are additional reasons. Classical Chinese is known for its economic use of words. The style of classical Chinese is simpler and more compact as compared with that of pai-hwa. Therefore, even in the text of the pai-hwa, we find frequent use of wen-yan for a more meaningful expression of ideas. Ordinarily, newspapers use pai-hwa but they have to resort to wen-yan to formulate pungent headlines and mast heads. This is so because wen-yan is able to convey ideas with fewer words and greater conciseness. Moreover, Chinese love proverbs and axioms. These are expressed in classical Chinese, which are often quoted in pai-hwa writings. In a word, without wen-yan, the Chinese language would lose its significance, strength, beauty, and richness.

Second, how to teach classical Chinese? We realize that classical Chinese is not a "new" or "different" language. It is merely a style different from that of modern Chinese. Therefore, it is necessary to learn, first of all, some of its features or characteristics. Among these, two stand out as most important: the "hsu-tzu" or "empty words" and grammar. Obviously, hsu-tzu is a misnomer. It is not an "empty word." It is indeed something very useful. Ancient texts of classical Chinese do not have punctuation. It is the hsu-tzu which serves this function. The difficult problem about hsu-tzu is that one hsu-tzu may have several different meanings according to its place in the sentence

structure where it is used, or the meaning that it forecasts, or the combination that it forms with another word or another hsu-tzu. For instance, the word "ch'ieh" (且). According to a study made by Professor Yang Chia-lo, "ch'ieh" has six kinds of writings, seven different pronunciations, 118 definitions, and 254 expressions involving it.[1] In a study on the hsu-tzu, "suo" (所), as in Tso Chuan (左 傳) by Professor Dung Liang-tung, "suo" is cited 409 times with seven different connotations.[2] However, if a basic knowledge has been developed with the use of hsu-tzu, the rest is easy, with regard to learning classical Chinese. Another problem concerns grammar. I do not suggest that Chinese grammar in the classical style is particularly difficult. There are no rigid rules either in the modern or classical style governing the use of the different parts of speech. However, I feel very strongly that the lack of a suitable and standard text in Chinese grammar has constituted a great problem for the effective instruction of classical Chinese in American colleges and universities. Several grammar books in the Chinese language are available. They include Ma-Shih-Wen-Tung by Ma Chieh-chung,[3] The Comparative Grammar by Lee Ching-ming and another by Chou Chih-ming, Essentials of Chinese Grammar by Lu Shu-hsiang, and An Introduction to Wen-yan by Ch'u Yu-yuan and Chow Ch'ih-nieh,[4] and A Historical Grammar of Ancient Chinese (Part I: Syntax; Part II:Morphology;Part III: Substitution; Part IV: Word-classes; by Chou Fa-kao which is most comprehensive and systematic.[5] However, all these are written in Chinese by Chinese scholars and for the use of

Chinese students interested in the study of Chinese linguistics and literary Chinese. But for American students also interested in the study of Chinese linguistics, there is but one suitable text to be found. It is written in English, entitled Introduction to Literary Chinese by J. Brandt and published by Frederick Ungar Publishing Company (third printing in 1954). It contains some explanations of syntax and literary Chinese grammar. However, the selections are rather limited and thus are unable to satisfy the wider and more demanding needs of American students.[6]

Third, what to teach? In some areas, there is no lack of teaching materials, except in suitable and ideal texts. There are not too many of these available. In my humble experience in the teaching field, I feel that for beginners the Hsiao Ching provided by the University of Chicago is one of the best, for several reasons. The Chinese text itself contains no more than 400 characters. It is easy to learn. Secondly, the text represents one of the basic philosophies of China. To learn Hsiao Ching is to learn the essence of the Confucian school of thought. Thirdly, the text consists of adequate and well-prepared notes which are of considerable help both to teachers and students. On the more advanced level, there are The Analects and Mencius, also published by the University of Chicago Press. In addition, the two volumes of Selected Works of Chinese Literature published by the American Association of Teachers of Chinese Language and Culture in New York provide adequate and over-all understanding of classical Chinese.

The complete set begins with the Book of Odes and ends with an essay by Chiang Kai-shek. It covers the entire spectrum of Chinese literature, both prose and poetry, ennobling contributions from China's cultural heritage. In the case of prose, different styles are used: narration, description, dialogue, letter, preface, eulogy, biography, and writings on special occasions. I understand that another volume is being prepared by Dr. Richard F. S. Yang of the University of Pittsburgh. It consists of twenty selected works of classical Chinese in different styles with a translation in modern Chinese. When this text is available, we will have the benefit of a comparative study of the classical and modern styles of Chinese, highlighting their differences and comparisons.

The fourth problem is when to teach? It seems to me that no classical Chinese should be taught without first a basic training and preparation in modern Chinese. It would be wise to introduce classical Chinese to a student, I mean American student, after he has had at least one or two years' training in pai-hwa, and has developed some "feeling" of the Chinese language. Another thing to be considered is, to what kind of students should classical Chinese be taught. In this regard, I feel very strongly that only those who have already had some background in Chinese culture and philosophy should be encouraged to learn this traditional language. Otherwise, it would be difficult for them to appreciate many of the important concepts which only students with maturity and intelligence and previous knowledge can do. For instance, phrases such as "filial piety," "The Tao," "transcendental

spirit," "phenomenal world," "cosmic order," etc., can only be understood by sophisticated students, who have already developed adequate knowledge of Chinese thought in Western languages. I would further suggest that no classical Chinese be taught systematically to American students on the secondary-school level.

Last, but not least, who is qualified to teach? This is a problem -- a difficult problem -- to be overcome not only in this country but also in the Republic of China where the teaching of classical Chinese is now being intensified. In Taiwan, there is a serious shortage of qualified teachers to teach effectively in high schools and colleges. The situation is even more serious in the United States. To be competent, the teacher of classical Chinese in American colleges and universities must possess these qualifications:

1. excellent command of the English language;
2. adequate knowledge of classical Chinese in its different styles, including prose, poetry, and other literary compositions;
3. good command of techniques for teaching American students;
4. attractive age, not older than 50;
5. appropriate academic degree, preferably a Ph.D.

Anyone who possesses all or some of these essential qualifications will have already secured a position much more rewarding than an instructor in colleges and universities.

These, then, are the fundamental problems found in the teaching of classical or literary Chinese in American institutions of higher learning that I submit for your consideration.

NOTES

1. "Explanation of the character 曰 and of Expression Involving It." Encyclopaedia Sinica, Taipei, 1957, Vol. 31, Part 1.

2. Tamkang Journal, (Taipei: Tamkang College of Arts and Sciences), February 1963, pp. 71-111.

3. Reprinted by Hsiu-hsing Book Company, Taipei, 1959.

4. Published by Heuoh-lin Book Company, Hong Kong.

5. Published by the Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica, Special Publications, No. 39, Taipei, 1959, 1961.

6. The book is composed of forty lessons comprising various styles of literary writing. The material of these lessons has been used for lectures given by the author in the North China Union Language School during a period of eighteen months to three successive groups of students. There is an excellent linguistic study of written Chinese by Bernhard Karlgren. Entitled The Chinese Language and published by the Ronald Press Company, New York, 1949, it provides the principal characteristics of Chinese with special emphasis on its nature and developmental process.